RESTORATION REVIEW

Sectarianism must be abolished. Henceforth let no one glory in his denomination. That is sectarianism. Let all people glory in Christ and practice brotherhood with all men. That is Christianity. — *Peter Ainslie*

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The Adventures of the Early Church …

WHAT WAS IMPORTANT TO THEM ABOUT JESUS?

I recently read *Be My Guest* by Conrad Hilton, which tells the exciting story of how a Texas lad started with one lowly hotel in Cisco, Texas and built it into the most impressive hotel chain in the world. The Hilton Hotel story is the story of Conrad Hilton, and without him there is no story. It is he that made it an adventure.

The story of the early church is like that in that there is "one solitary figure" behind the story. It is he that made it an adventure. It is he that created the church and not the church that created him. Apart from him the church has no meaning.

When singer Pat Boone, who was at the time a member of the Church of Christ, discovered a closer walk with this man behind the story, he used the story of Conrad Hilton in an effort to explain what happened to him. It is one thing to take a room at a Hilton hotel, he said, but it is something else to be Mr. Hilton's personal guest in the penthouse on the roof. Pat had known *about* Jesus for many years, he told us, but in his new walk he came to know the man himself. He had "checked in" at church all those years, but he found himself empty and lonely. So one day he opened the door to the One who knocked and moved up to a "penthouse" relationship.

That gets close to the secret of the early church. The world soon took notice that they had been with Jesus, and it was this that explains the power of their ministry. Jesus was with them and they were with him to the end. They watched as he was taken up in a cloud into heaven. He left a promise with them that they believed even unto death itself: *I will be with you always, even unto the end of the age.* If Peter and the others lost their faith for a time, it was so impressively regained that the rulers of the people marveled at the boldness with which they proclaimed the Jesus story, seeing that they were uneducated and untrained men (Acts 4:13).

That passage tells the secret, for it says the rulers "began to recognize them as having been with Jesus." And they believed that Jesus was still with them, which explains how they, unlearned men who would not dare to confront the authorities, spoke with such boldness and confidence to those who heard them.

Early on in the adventure of the early church we see that it was the person of Jesus Christ as friend, teacher, Lord, and savior that was important, but foremost was the presence of Jesus as a living reality. One of Jesus' appearances following his resurrection was to seven of his apostles out fishing. When John saw who it was he said to Peter, "It is the Lord.': Peter responded with such excitement that he jumped out of the boat in his haste to reach Jesus, leaving John to man the boat. At this time there was hardly a *theological* Jesus in Peter's mind. There was simply Jesus whom he loved as Lord and teacher, the one he had come to know, not by reading of him in the Scriptures, but by being with him in a real and personal way.

When we ask ourselves with the New Testament in hand what was important to them about Jesus, we are struck with at least one major surprise. His life story, his biography, was not important. When a British scholar was asked by a newspaper to prepare a biography of Christ, he rejected the invitation by explaining that there was no data for such an assignment. Since so many *Lives* of Jesus have been written, from Renan to Schweitzer, it is evident that all scholars have not been so candid. Judging by the accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John we can only conclude that they had no interest in writing a *Life* of Jesus of Nazareth, for surely they could have had they deemed it important. Besides the birth narratives and one brief episode in his childhood, there is nothing at all about Jesus until he was thirty years old. Even then the story is mostly confined to just a few weeks of his life.

Some of the more curious Christians of later generations speculated on Jesus' early life. One story they invented was that Jesus as a boy joined his playmates in making clay pigeons. The playmates watched as Jesus' pigeons came to life and flew away. Another has little Jesus restoring life to a playmate that fell from a tree and died. These are part of what is now called *The Apocryphal New Testament,* which, while wholly unreliable, serves to show how void the New Testament is of all such sensationalism.

What was important to Mark was "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God," and that is how his record begins and that is what it is about. John resorted to hyperbole in saying that the world could not contain the books that *could* be written about Jesus (Jn. 21:25), and he admitted that he had left out many things that *should* be written (Jn. 20:30). Nonetheless what he *did* write was adequate for his purpose and for what he considered crucial: "These things have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ; and that believing you may have life in his name" (Jn. 20:31).

Luke's account is especially interesting since he goes at it like an investigative reporter, and he reveals to us that there were "many" written records about Jesus, none of which really satisfied his purpose. So he "investigated everything carefully from the beginning" so as to prepare a "consecutive order" of the story. The records he had at his disposal, which probably included Mark (or a source used by Mark), must have been too disconnected to suit him, and maybe not accurate enough, for in his preface he wants his reader to know "the exact truth about the things you have been taught." By this time a body of teaching was circulating over the Roman world about Jesus and his community. Luke laid it all out orderly, adequately, and truthfully —like a physician with his scalpel stripping away the fat and leaving it all lean. So if we want to know what the early church considered really important about Jesus we should read Luke.

And of course Matthew, but here the purpose is different since Matthew wrote for the benefit of Jewish readers. So it is important to him for Jesus to walk right out of the Jewish Scriptures as the Messiah, the fulfillment all the prophets had longed for. And Matthew was eager to present Jesus as Israel's great teacher, one who clothed the mystery of the kingdom of God in parables.

Up to this point (the end of the first generation of believers) we can say that what the church saw as really important about Jesus was two things; (1) what Jesus was as a person, their love for him as friend, teacher, Lord, savior, and here their concepts would not likely make heavy theology; (2) "all that Jesus began to do and teach" as Luke puts it in Acts 1;1; now there was "the message" about a person, his ministry and his teaching, and they wanted it told right, and they now wanted it in writing.

In time a consensus began to form as to what Jesus meant to them. If the virgin birth (miraculous conception is a more accurate term) was not part of that consensus, being only in Matthew and Luke, there was consensus that his life did not begin in a manger but that it reached back into eternity itself. It was important to Matthew that when Jesus was on trial before the Sanhedrin and was asked point blank *Are you the Christ?* he answered unequivocally *Yes, I am.* It was on that occasion that Jesus told the Council that the Son of Man, a clear reference to himself, would soon be seated at the right hand of God (22:69).

It is John and Paul, however, who reflect a heavy theology of the preexistence or eternity of Jesus. John records Jesus saying "Before Abraham was, I am" (Jn. 8:58), a declaration that so frustrated the Jews that they attempted to stone him. Beyond that John sees Jesus as the eternal Word of God that became man (Jn. 1:14). Paul reveals that Jesus

previously existed in “the form of God,” then “emptied himself” and became man (Philip. 2:6-7), and the apostle sees him as “the image of the invisible God” and as one who existed before all other existence (Col. 1;15-17).

There can be no question but what the early Christians saw Jesus as one who came from another world. Down to the last book of the New Testament Jesus is heard saying “I am the first and the last, and the living one (Rev. 1:17), and he is called “the Word of God” (Rev. 19;13) as well as “the Lord of Lords and King of Kings” (Rev. 17:14).

Among the most important things about Jesus to his followers was that he was the Messiah, though they may have had only a superficial understanding of what this meant. For whatever reason Jesus did not permit those he cured (Mk. 5:43), the demons he encountered (Mk. I ;34) or even his disciples (Mk. 8:30) to reveal that he was the Messiah. This “Messianic secret,” as the scholars have come to call it, was to be kept until after his resurrection (Mk. 9:9). What is important to us is that the earliest disciples believed the secret even though they were puzzled as to what he might have meant by “rising from the dead” (Mk. 9:10).

In all these things that the first disciples believed about Jesus it says something to us that their faith was far from perfect. The faith of some faltered even as they looked upon the risen Christ, and even on the verge of his ascension into heaven some still had trouble with their faith (Mt. 28:17). And these were his own apostles who became the foundation of the church. This should give us pause to be gracious to each other in our faltering ways and not be quick to draw the line on each other. Their faith, like ours must often have been like the man who cried out to Jesus “I do believe; help my unbelief” (Mk. 9;24).

Even this struggle with faith helps us to understand what they believed (or tried to believe) about Jesus. It was the resurrection event that was both their strength and their weakness, for they believed it and yet they did not, as if it were too good to be true, as in Lk. 24:41: “And while they still could not believe it for joy and were marveling, he said to them, ‘Have you anything to eat?’”

While the resurrection was not the *cause* of their faith (since they already believed in Jesus), it *authenticated* their faith, especially after their hopes were dashed by the death of Christ. And so the resurrection became the heart of the proclamation. The resurrection meant that God had made Jesus both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36) and that he was now at

the right hand of God in heaven (Acts 2;33). It even served as proof that God would one day judge the world (Acts 17:31). It was the grand truth that served as the basis for preaching repentance and remission of sins to the world (Lk. 24:47).

All this and much more is what was important about Jesus to the early church. The images they created to describe him, whether prophet, priest, king, mediator, judge, lamb, shepherd, physician, and many more, indicate that they were lost for words in telling what he meant to them. He was both the bread of life and the light of the world, the alpha and the omega and the bright morning star.

While Jesus is called "the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4) and certainly "the Son of God" (Mk. 1:1), the New Testament is hesitant to call him God *per se.* Except for one or two doubtful passages in John, none of the gospels goes so far as to call Jesus God. I say "doubtful" because the translation "the Word was God" (Jn. 1:1), which would be a clear instance of Jesus being called God, might better be rendered "The Word is of God" or, as in the *New English Version,* "what God was the Word was." The reason for this is that there is no article *the* before God in the Greek, which makes for the same difference in English as *The judge* is *the man,* which makes the two nouns identical, and *The judge* is *man,* which gives the second noun adjectival form. So it is doubtful that Jn. 1:1 calls Jesus God though it certainly says that Jesus is of the nature of God.

Some versions have Jn. 1:18 call Jesus "the only begotten God," but here we have a problem as to what the correct reading is since the old manuscripts differ, some having "the only begotten Son."

In Jn. 20:28 we have a clear instance of Jesus being called "My Lord and my God" by the doubtful Thomas who now fully believes. But it strikes the reader as more emotional than theological, the response of a loving heart more than a serious effort to describe the nature of Christ.

There are a few other instances that may appear to call Jesus God, such as Tit. 2:13 and 1 Jn. 5:20, but in each case there is a problem either with the text or how it. should be interpreted. The bottom line seems to be that the early Christians *did* believe that Jesus was God, but, because of their strong Jewish heritage that insisted that God is one, they could never quite bring themselves to put it in writing. He was in the image of God, the form of God, the Son of God, and "what God was Jesus was," but never unequivocally *Jesus* is *God.*

Do we not have the same problem? When we read of Jesus coming down from heaven to do the will of the one who sent him (Jn. 6:38), of God sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3) and of Paul saying "the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. 11:3), along with all the praying that Jesus did to his Father in heaven, we too are reluctant to say *Jesus* is *God* (period).

I like the way one theologian put it: "I believe that Jesus was God, but not that God was Jesus." It seems that the New Testament tries to say something like that.

This problem led to what is called adoptionism, which is the theory that Jesus was like any other man, but one who so magnificently obeyed the will of God under such trying circumstances that God *adopted* him as a son. While this may appear to be supported by Jesus' passion to do his Father's will, adoptionism was named a heresy by the church and was not the belief of the early Christians. It is nonetheless an understandable heresy.

I conclude that it was the man himself, his magnificent and magnanimous humanity, that impressed the earliest believers most of all. While they came to see him as the Son of God and as the Messiah, and while this was confirmed by his resurrection from the dead, it was still the simplicity of the person, his transparent love, his forgiving spirit, his compassion for the dispossessed, his devotion to the heavenly Father, his courage in the face of danger, his commitment to his mission, and his tender, yielding attitude toward them that stole their hearts.

John did not lay his head on Jesus' breast, a touching description of the love they had for each other, because he believed that Jesus was the Messiah. He loved him anyhow, *deeply*, and because he was Jesus. Jesus disarmed them by his utter unselfishness and awed them by his perfect, sinless humanity. Since they often talked things over apart from him, we can believe that they were sometimes speechless in his presence. His presence must have been overwhelming. The mystery was the man himself. Yet his love was so overflowing that they were comfortable, even overjoyed, in his company. Even their unbelief in the presence of the risen Christ was "for joy" (Lk. 24:41). We can believe that their joy was not so much that the Scriptures had been fulfilled or that he was authenticated as the Christ, but that their dear friend and teacher was alive again.

This is the great secret of the faith of the early church: *they believed their dear, loving friend was still with them,* even if he was in a sense their absent friend. This was the meaning of the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. The Holy Spirit was the presence of their absent Lord. And so they believed in the reality of what Jesus had promised - *I will be with you always.*

To the extent that we come to know Jesus like that, and not only truths about him, we too will have that secret power within us. It is the most liberating and life-changing concept in the history of thought. And, believe me, it is the only way to a religion of joy. *—the Editor*

> From birth onward, the human and the divine were united in Jesus. Yet their union was so natural that the one never seemed to be something additional or accidental to the other. He was born and grew up like other children. He increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man (Lk. 2:52). He was hungry, tempted, tired, limited in knowledge;' he could be indignant and angry, he was sociable and sympathetic, he prayed, and in the end he was crucified and killed. At the same time, he repeatedly made claims and performed actions that were appropriate only to God. Harry R. Boer, *A Short History of the Early Church,* p. 16.

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SEPARATED BUT NOT DIVIDED

I recall years ago when I was teaching at Bethany College that Perry Gresham, then the president of that institution, told some of us that the leaders of the church around the world should gather and issue a joint proclamation that *the church* is *united!*

That is what Thomas Campbell said in his "Declaration and Address," which dates back to 1809 and is one of the founding documents of our Movement. "The Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one," he wrote. He saw the church united as a reality, not simply as an ideal. It is the nature of the church to be one; it cannot be other than one. It is an extension of the apostle's affirmation, by way of a question, in 1 Cor. 1:13, *Is Christ divided?*

Campbell and Gresham were taking a page from Paul. Christ *cannot* be divided. The church as the Body of Christ is one. There may be sects imposing themselves upon that Body. There may be schisms within its ranks, threatening the life of that Body. But still the church is there, withstanding the onslaught of "the gates of Hades," and it is one.

There is another "catholic" (yes, indeed, Campbell and Gresham were speaking as "catholics" in referring to the church as necessarily one) that has long been witnessing to the church at large of its inherent oneness. David J. Du Plessis is now 80. Sometime back the pope gave him a gold medal in tribute to his message of unity to the whole church, and Fuller Seminary has now named a Center for him, which will serve as a depository of his books and papers as an envoy of peace among and beyond all denominations. I say "beyond" because his own denomination, the Assemblies of God, excommunicated him when he began to work within the World Council of Churches, only to reinstate him years later when they saw that he was right in insisting that the Pentecostals were not the only Christians.

He says it was a blessing when the Assemblies defrocked him, for he was then in a position to be truly ecumenical. Though a Pentecostal in persuasion and practice, he has been busy all these years telling any denomination that will listen that the Body of Christ is beyond them all, and that all who are in Christ are one in that Body. And that includes the Roman Catholics. When word reached the ears of Cardinal Bea in Rome that David du Plessis was saying things "that Rome needs to hear," he was invited to the Holy See. He told Rome that unity is in no denomination, no system, no hierarchy, but only in the Holy Spirit. That did not keep the pope, who presides over a system that traditionally holds that unity is possible only in the Holy See, from honoring him as a man of peace and unity.

When Cardinal Bea called Du Plessis a holy man, he protested. But the cardinal insisted, "Since you are a man of the Holy Spirit, you must be a holy man."

When they asked Du Plessis about the "How" of unity, he responds with "Our unity is not based on how; our unity is based on Who." He stresses that since there is but one Head there can be but one Body. The basis of renewal, he says, is in that great promise "Behold, I make all things new," and renewal, he says, is an ongoing process. To all the denominations he presses home the point, *Do not think you have arrived.*

While Du Plessis is Pentecostal and believes in glossolalia, he is persuaded that Christians can differ on such things and find their oneness in the person of Christ. It is the Holy Spirit within us that makes us one, not theological conformity, he says.

And he says this as if it were his motto, *Be separated but not divided*, which is similar to a saying of our own pioneers, *We are free to differ but not to divide.* Du Plessis sees nothing wrong in our separations so long as we accept each other as equals in Christ. He points to his own family as an example. Even though the parents and their six children and the grandchildren are all scattered, still they are united. This is not only expressed with get-togethers on special occasions and by frequent contacts by phone but also by a constant acceptance of each other. It can be the same with Christians. Our love and acceptance of each other will transcend denominational loyalties.

I am convinced that Du Plessis' approach to unity is the only one that will prove effective, and it is really the "Stone-Campbell" position as it was originally set forth. We do not work for unity; we rather accept the Spirit's gift of unity to the church. We *are* already united with all those who are in Christ. We are one with all those in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. We are not united with Baptists nor Methodists nor Church of Christ members but with Christians, all Christians everywhere. Such unity rises above all the sectarian and denominational barriers. Unity is between believers, not structures nor systems nor ecclesiasticisms.

Can it really be any other way? Has it ever been any other way? Wasn't the unity of the early church a "separated but not divided" unity. Was it not so with Paul and Barnabas — separated but not divided? And with Paul and Peter and all those who were "somewhat" in the church —he went his way to the circumcised and they went theirs, separated but not divided. And there are the churches that probably could not have successfully gathered under the same roof, such as Jerusalem and Antioch, but still they were united in Christ, separated but not divided. We all know, Christians with whom we had rather not work. They are there and we are here, and it is better that way. But we love and accept each other, separated but not divided.

This is not the same as separatism, which is a separation that says, "Unless you see and do as I see and do I will not accept you as an equal." Separatism dictates no fellowship, no association, no cooperation, no recognition. Separatism is an exclusivism that assumes to have arrived and to have all the truth, and to have anything to do with others would be "fellowshipping error."

An attitude of "separated but not divided" recognizes that because of tradition, race, social status, personal preference, or longstanding theological differences "they" are there and "we" are here, and that this is not likely to change in the foreseeable future. But still,

because of our common *loyalty to Christ* (Can there really be any other test?), we can recognize and treat each other as equals in Christ and perhaps do some things together. While we may not be able to do everything together, we can surely do some things together.

Differences, mostly those passed along to us by our forebears, may keep us separated, but they do not have to divide us in heart and mind. It is being *against* another that makes for division, while separation may only be circumstantial. Most blacks, for example, do not care to assemble with whites, and many poor Christians are not comfortable in rich churches. Separation without division is, therefore, possible so long as no one is *against* anybody. This assumes that division, which is named a sin in Scripture, is in the heart and head of man and not merely in outward circumstances. Jesus seemed to think this way when he said "He who is not against me is for me."

Separated but not divided! It might at least serve as a fresh starting point in our thinking. With time we might flesh it out to mean, *Separated by circumstances but equal in Christ.* Is that not the way it is with all those that believe that Jesus is Lord and who obey him in all things according to their understanding, to quote Alexander Campbell? — *the Editor*

> The fact of brotherhood must become as permanently established in human thought as the fact of Christ. As upon the two great commandments rest the law and the prophets, likewise upon these two great facts rests the salvation of the world. The future is rich with the promises of God and the spiritual possibilities of mankind. An infidel world is the price we are paying for a divided Church. The time is at hand when the honour of Christ and the salvation of a world must rise above our pride of party and contentment of divisions in obedience to the will of God on earth. Sectarianism must be abolished. Henceforth let no man glory in his denomination; that is sectarianism: but let all men glory in Christ and practice brotherhood with men; that is Christianity. - Peter Ainslie, *If Not A United Church, What?*, p. 103.

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UNITY IN DIVERSITY: WHERE DO WE DRAW THE LINE?

We still hear adverse responses to the idea of unity in diversity, mostly from the Church of Christ right wing, and I am still at a loss to understand how anyone can seriously deny the validity of the concept. I could as easily believe that one would deny that a triangle has three angles as for him to deny that it is the nature of unity to be diverse. Reference is even made to the "unity-in-diversity heresy," and I am now and again named as one of the heretics, along with the likes of Carl Ketcherside.

Now and again for a quarter of a century Carl and I have noted that the beauty of Christian unity is that believers who are quite different from each other in many ways and who have diverse views about the Bible can still love and accept each other and be one together in the Body of Christ. We have pointed to the apostles as an example. Not only did Jesus select Matthew the tax collector, but also Simon the Zealot, political opposites and no doubt personality opposites. But their love for Christ transcended the differences and they found peace and oneness in their mutual faith. That is what unity is all about.

Then there is Paul and Peter who differed and Paul and Barnabas, and even the New Testament churches were as diverse as churches today are. The New Testament plea for unity implies the prevalence of difficult differences, such as "Be always humble, gentle, and patient. Show your love by being tolerant with one another. Do your best to preserve the unity which the Spirit gives by means of the peace that binds you together" (Eph. 4:2-3, GN), Why call for tolerance or forbearance if there are not rather serious differences to absorb? The binding or uniting power of peace implies a union of diverse elements.

All the unity passages imply a blending of diverse elements or they mandate an acceptance of each other despite differences. Such as:

"Welcome the person who is weak in faith, but do not argue with him about his personal opinions" (Rom. 14:1).

"One person thinks that a certain day is more important than other days, while someone else thinks that all days are the same. Each one should firmly make up his own mind" (Rom. 14:5).

"Accept one another, then, for the glory of God, as Christ has accepted you" (Rom. 15:7).

"There are different ways of serving, but the same Lord is served. There are different abilities to perform service, but the same God gives ability to everyone for their particular service" (1 Cor. 12:5-6).

Even those passages that instruct us to "agree," such as 1 Cor. 1:10: "By the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ I appeal to all of you, my brothers, to agree in what you say, so that there will be no divisions among you," indicate that the agreement is to be on the basics of the gospel of Jesus Christ, not on the myriad of opinions that can be found in any church, which would be an impossible requirement.

Moreover, Carl Ketcherside and I have suggested numerous examples of unity in diversity from everyday life. We have tried to show that the only unity that is possible is unity in diversity. There is no other kind! There are the diverse elements that make up marriage and the family, and yet unity is often beautifully manifested. Then there is music. A symphony orchestra is not composed of people who all play the same instrument, and yet there is harmony.

The planetary system is an impressive example of unity in diversity. In spite of millions of stars and planets, all different, there is what the philosophers called "the music of the spheres." Then there is the human body with all its varied members in a unity that glorifies God, as does all nature which is unity in diversity.

Since Carl and I first presented this thesis, the unity and diversity in the New Testament has emerged as a lively study among scholars, particularly in British circles. Prof. James D. G. Dunn has written an entire book on the subject. I am sure he would be surprised to learn that the very idea of unity in diversity is a heresy!

The charitable response to this criticism is to conclude that the critics do not quite mean what they say. After all, they are not idiots but responsible and intelligent men. They themselves are examples of unity in diversity, for they do not agree on everything and yet they are united, especially in opposing unity in diversity!

I take it that they really mean something like "unity with excessive diversity" is wrong, or "unity with extreme and dangerous doctrines" is a heresy. They do not fear all differences in thinking, but *certain* differences. They both believe and practice diversity in their unity, but it is a *selective* diversity. They might differ on whether a Christian can join the military but not on instrumental music.

I have learned one thing in particular from their complaint, which I appreciate, and that is the implication that *we do not seem to know where to draw the line*. They have said, "Ketcherside and Garrett fellowship anybody and everybody. Anything goes." That is not the case, of course, but maybe we have failed to make ourselves clear in that regard. I have been accused of accepting even the Mormons.

All through the years Carl has been emphatic in explaining that he shares the common life (fellowship) with all who are *in Christ.* He further explained that this includes all immersed believers. We are united in faith and obedience; we can differ on opinions and methods, such as instrumental music or Sunday Schools. One would think that that would circumvent any such charge as "He fellowships anybody and everybody."

I have agreed with this limitation to fellowship, stating that the unity in diversity for which we plead is *Christian* unity, a unity of *believers* and not inclusive of anybody and everybody, whether Sikhs, Hindus, or atheists. Yes, as Carl likes to put it, unity of all those who are *in Christ.* If a Mormon is in Christ, then he would be included; if not, he would not be. But a Mormon would be in the fellowship, not because he is a Mormon but because he is a Christian, in spite of Mormonism.

But my critics have made me more conscience of what really does constitute "the bottom line" in feowship. Of course, the line is to be drawn. Unity in diversity does *not* mean that there are no parameters, no limitations, no lines. That we have been too quick to draw the line on "the brother for whom Christ died," to quote the apostle, does not mean that the line is not to be drawn.

I have become increasingly uncomfortable with making baptism the place to draw the line, particularly our own doctrine and practice of baptism. The apostle Paul has influenced me in some of my recent conclusions. He found *baptized* disciples in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-2), but he was not satisfied until they were filled with the Holy Spirit. And in the case of Cornelius (Acts 10) we have a case of believers receiving the Spirit *before* they were baptized. Can we fellowship believers who have received the Holy Spirit though not yet baptized?

But even more important is the obvious fact that a person is not necessarily a true Christian and in the "fellowship of the Spirit" just because he has been baptized. There must be many baptized "carnal" Christians, and according to 1 Cor. 3:1 there is a question that they are really Christians.

I prefer the "test" or "the line drawn" by the early church, the church of New Testament times, and that is the confession that *Jesus* is *Lord!* That is my creed and that is where I draw the line, on the Lordship of Christ. This means loyalty and commitment to Jesus Christ as the Lord of glory.

While such a one will almost certainly be a baptized believer, that is not the bottom line. Is he faithful and loyal to Jesus Christ according to his age, understanding, and ability?

With this simple standard we will get back to our pioneers in the Stone-Campbell Movement as well as to the simple faith of the primitive community. Isaac Errett named Christlikeness as the only test that the church should require, and Alexander Campbell called for "general obedience to Christ" or "one who habitually obeys" as the mark of the Christian, which allows for errors in intellect, "imbecility" being his word. It was "errors of the heart" that troubled Campbell.

But long before Stone and Campbell there were those Republican Methodists under the leadership of James O'Kelly and Rice Haggard, our earliest pioneers in northern Virginia, back in 1794, who became simply Christians and named their new church the Christian Church or Church of Christ. They drew up a document called *Cardinal Principles of the Christian Church,* which captured the essence of what our Movement was all about. One principle was "Christian character, or vital piety, the only test of church fellowship and membership."

We were clearly off to a good start with such defensible parameters to fellowship, but what has happened to us when we now draw the line on each other over organs, agencies, societies, and even millennial theories and glossolalia?

Thomas Campbell got off to an uneasy start along these lines when he first organized the Brush Run church. He made a theological question a test for membership *(What* is *the meritorious cause of a sinner's acceptance with God?),* which actually excluded some who would be members since they could not answer the question to Campbell's satisfaction. His son Alexander questioned that such a test should be made and it was soon dropped. But it is a quirk in our heritage that the first Church of Christ under the Campbells was organized originally on the basis of a creed. It was not only quickly dropped, but Alexander Campbell insisted that no opinion would ever be a test, not even the slavery

issue. Even that was a difference they could absorb in their unity, and Alexander Campbell prophesied early on that the slavery issue would never divide his people since they did not allow opinions to become issues. We can say, looking back, that he was *generally* correct.

If the Campbells, after first slipping, would not allow a doctrine about the atonement to be made a test and if Paul would not allow differences about dietary laws and holy days be made a test, how can we afford to make tests over varied notions and methods?

The confession of the early Christians, for which they went to prison and even to the stake and to the lions, should be the only test, *Jesus* is *Lord!* And since fellowship has its parameters *within* the church, Christian character should be the only expectation, and even that is to be viewed in terms of ability and opportunity. And even here we cannot be judgmental, allowing each to follow Christ and become like him in his or her own unique way. We are to encourage each other in Christlikeness.

We will of course always be true to our heritage and to the Scriptures and bear witness to baptism by immersion for the remission of sins within a fellowship of loving acceptance of all who honor Jesus as Lord. But we must not allow baptism to become the *sine Qua non* (the absolute necessity). Even Jesus was baptized, but I do not follow him because he was baptized but because of who he was and is. He is the *sine qua non! —the Editor*

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"SILENCE OF THE SCRIPTURES:" A SHOPWORN MYTH

W. Carl Ketcherside

One thing which protects most of our myths within the restoration movement is the inborn and irrational fear of what would happen to us if we surrendered them. So we conceal them beneath a camouflage fabric which may, in the end, prove more harmful to us than the myth. Let me provide you a good example related to the shopworn myth about "the authority of silence."

When anyone questions it he is immediately bombarded with all of the things which will happen to us if it is repealed. Irresponsible individuals will introduce burning of incense, sprinkling of holy water, and phylacteries. G. K. Wallace once described a man coming to the assembly with a sheep draped over his shoulder to offer as a sacrifice. This was his method of combating the use of instrumental music in public praise. It is time to pose a few queries.

I have very serious doubts that all of the dire things predicted would be brought forward in "the restoration movement." If they were it would be as the result of ignorance of our relationship to God under the new covenant. How are we to deal with such ignorance? We realize that only voluntary ignorance is a sin. Involuntary ignorance never is. What is the remedy for ignorance? Is it the devising and imposing of pseudo-sacred laws such as "the authority of silence?" Is it not rather instruction in the way of the Lord more perfectly?

But suppose those who trust in such things refuse to be taught? We have done all we can do if we instruct them according to the revealed will. Learning is a slow process and requires much patience. I think it is this which motivates us to formulate creeds and to legislate rules. They circumvent the need to teach by drawing an arbitrary line of fellowship. We can then hibernate with those who agree with our opinions and are subject to our spiritual whims.

The early saints were bothered with such problems as eating of meats and keeping of certain days. It is interesting to remember that not once did the apostle Paul pull "the law of silence" upon them. The fact is that never once in the sacred scripture is this law, which has become so much a part of our vocabulary, ever mentioned. If it was one of the laws of God it was never invoked by one of his spokesmen. Circumcision was introduced and was one of the most divisive threats ever faced by the church of God. Paul dealt with it very simply by pointing out that "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation." That would settle most of our divisive problems if we quoted it and believed in it.

The imposition of creeds has been the bane of the Christian faith. These simplistic approaches to communion of the saints are intended to cut through the red-tape and specify the will of God. Inevitably they have been divisive as men have refused to bend the knee or genuflect before them. The so-called "Authority of silence" is such a creed, dreamed up by a clerical caste and saddled upon the people of God. One of its chief sins is that it interposes itself between a man and his Lord. It subtly separates us from Jesus Christ. Instead of repairing to Him to learn the infinite truth He came to reveal, it forces us to study the distillations of "great men" among us to secure the formulae by which to understand what the Perfect Teacher instructs us to believe.

The truth of heaven is eternal and boundless. Who could think of shutting it up in the few lines of an abstract creed, or confining it in a handful of propositions sifted out of the beautiful whole? As well might one try to bottle the rain which falls from the firmament, or can the snow which descends from the clouds. It would be like trying to capture the free winds which blow across the universe and separate them into properly labeled parcels. The faith of God cannot be reduced to a system by the finite minds of puny men. It cannot be defined and measured out as if it were a product of human manufacture. “The wind bloweth where it listeth.”

Men seek to protect themselves from the thoughts of other men. They devise restricting ideas and pass them off as the will of God. By claiming the authority of heaven for their statements they seek to bend other free souls into conformity with their methods. But words are only rude hints of a Christian’s mind. “Out of your bellies shall flow living water.” And the rushing torrent cannot be confined or dammed by any generation. “The waters will overflow the hiding place, the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies.” Instead of trying to control men by passing laws we should teach them to associate as free men under Jesus.

Recently, in correspondence with a brother, eminent within his sect, and highly regarded by thousands as a respected teacher, I asked him for a scripture which taught “the authority of silence.” He cited only one. It was Hebrews 7:14. “For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah, of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood.” I have thought about this arbitrary usage a great deal. Why did this man, who holds many meetings and professes to be a teacher of the unlearned resort to this passage. I am forced to the conclusion that it was merely because the words “spake nothing” occurred in it. He ignored the remote context and purpose of the entire letter, and the proximate context of the chapter, and his eye fell on the expression “spake nothing.” Out of this thin filament he spun the tenuous thread that has disturbed saints, divided the church and destroyed unity.

We ought to be ashamed to live and afraid to die. We twist the scriptures to our own destruction. And we do it to uphold the traditions of our fathers who were often good but ignorant men living on the frontier. Was Christ not a priest under the law merely because Moses spake nothing of the tribe of Judah? Was it not rather because God said to Aaron, “You and your sons shall keep your priest’s office . . . and you shall serve . . . I have given your priest’s office unto you as a service of gift” (Numbers 18:7). Was it not because God had spoken rather than because of what he had not said, as Uzziah learned to his shame and his subsequent death? And was it not because God had designed a greater priesthood for Jesus than that of the tribe of Levi?

What would happen if we were to repeal “the law of silence” which we have settled as a pall upon the churches? For your information, a lot of places have already done so. They have not said they were doing so, for seldom do we admit that we have been wrong. It causes us to lose face. But there is a conspiracy of silence about “the law of silence.” No more are there labored and tortuous sermons on it. People are becoming free. Occasionally, an imported preacher who comes in to “hold a gospel meeting” unwittingly gets on the theme and belabors it. But he is flogging a dead horse. And he finds an apathetic response. The hearers have outgrown him in their thinking. While I am not a prophet, nor the son of a prophet, I’d like to predict a lessening of tensions as time moves on. Lord, hasten the day!

This is what happens when succeeding generations outgrow preceding ones. It is impossible to remain shackled to the past. The nerveless fingers on the skeletal hands of our fathers reaching from the sepulcher must relinquish their grip upon us. We escape from the ghosts of the past and are better for having done so. It is not enough to justify a thing to thinking men and women, by saying, “We have always done it this way.” Time gives no sanction to error. We do not sanction wrong by repetition. John F. Kennedy said to the United Nations General Assembly, on Sept. 25, 1961: “Conformity is the jailer of freedom and the enemy of growth.” We can never have the unity for which our Lord prayed by conformity.

There comes the moment when a still small voice must be raised in questioning. I think that moment has come.

It was Thoreau who wrote: “No way of thinking or doing, however ancient, can be trusted without proof.” *—4420 Jamison, Apt. 1C, St. Louis 63109.*

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

The Garnett Rd. Church of Christ in Tulsa finished their new facility in March, just in time to host a unity gathering of leaders from Christian Churches and Churches of Christ. Over 3,000 were present their first Sunday in the new building. As part of the celebration they fed “the 5000” at a dinner for friends, members and former members.

Several of our readers sent us clippings of the "Dear Abby" column in which Abigail Van Buren tells of a Disciples of Christ minister's estrangement from his daughter and her husband because they allowed the minister's grandchild to be christened Episcopalian. Abby rebuked the grandparents for their intolerance, saying "Until you respect your daughter's right to religious freedom, forget about your 'rights' as a grandparent." In a subsequent column Abby quoted from another Disciples minister who commended her and explained that the Christian Church doesn't claim to be the only Christians and has always worked for the unity of all believers. The wife of another Disciples minister also wrote Abby suggesting that the grandparents need to get acquainted with their own heritage. Abby told her readers that Kenneth L. Teegarden, president of the Disciples, had also written her, expressing similar sentiments. A reader of ours in Indiana wrote to us that he would never have believed that such a controversy would appear in "Dear Abby." Since that columnist appears to be every ounce an opportunist, I would have believed it.

The National Coalition of TV Violence reports that violence on TV has increased 65% in the past four years. This includes the Saturday a.m. cartoons for children. The *U.S. News & World Report* states that "a wide-ranging drive is under way to improve the quality of TV shows for American children." If you wish to be kept informed on this vital problem and perhaps lend a helping hand, ask Martha Roundtree, a true crusader, to put you on her mailing list. Address:7945 MacArthur Blvd., Cabin John, MD 20818.

Little Rock Litigation

The latest on the lawsuit in Little Rock, in which a longtime member of the Sixth and Izard Church of Christ is asking the court to order the elders to reveal financial information to the members, is that the elders asked the court to dismiss the case on the ground that they are immune to such litigation because of separation of church and state. This the court refused to do, noting that it was not the "laws of God" at issue but the laws of the State of Arkansas, for the Sixth and Izard Church of Christ is incorporated according to such laws and amenable to them. The issue for Churches of Christ in this case is that the elders are behaving contrary to what we have always stood for as a people, freedom of information in reference to the affairs of the church. The elders act as if they have something to hide, and they go against both Scripture and our own recognized practice in this matter. One of the most influential men in Church of Christ history, David Lipscomb, said this: "The elders are not to rule by arbitrary authority, as lords over God's heritage, but in all matters it is their duty to let every act of the congregation to be known to all and to satisfy everyone of the congregation of the rightness of the proposed action, and to hear every man's objections and seek to remove them and lerad them as examples to the flock,

so that all may be united in one mind and one judgement and may as one body all work harmoniously and heartily to the same end" (Quoted in *The Role of Elders in the New Testament Church* by Waymon D. Miller, p. p.29).

Don DeWelt of College Press recently visited Christian Church missions in Poland and reports that he had freedom of movement and assembly. He was accompanied by a native minister. He was encouraged by the faithfulness of these deprived people.

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BOOK NOTES

The Fool of God by Louis Cochran is back in print in handsome hardback and we will send you a copy for 12.50 postpaid. This is a historical novel on the life of Alexander Campbell. The author, now deceased, was a friend of mine, and he told me that everything in the book can be documented as factual. It is a delightful way to become acquainted with Campbell and those about him.

Other important titles about our heritage are available from our office: *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell* (21.95), *Campbell-Rice Debate* (19.95), *Elder John Smith (13.50), Elder Ben Franklin* (15.95). Prices include postage.

For general American church history you will delight in the two-volume set by Edwin S. Gaustad entitled *A Documentary History of Religion in America,* which takes you from the Puritans to the Mormons, from the Salem witch trials to the war over abortion with lots of pictures, including Alexander Campbell (and a selection from Barton Stone), though it gives the wrong name to Campbell's wife pictured with him, the first wife's name for the second. This set is a veritable gold mine of information and you can start reading anywhere. The set, 34.00, nearly 1200 pages.

Many of our people are students of William Barclay's *Daily Bible Study,* an 18-volume commentary covering all the New Testament. We can supply these at 6.95 per volume in soft cover or 115.00 for the set. You can now get the *Daily Bible Study* on the Old Testament as they are published, with fifteen now available. You might start with *The Twelve Prophets* (Vol. I) and *Isaiah* (Vol. I) and add to your set in time. These are 6.95 each, postpaid. I am confident that once you start you will want all these books.

A fair and impressive treatment of our national problems is John Whitehead's *The Stealing of America.* He asks whether our nation is being stolen by radical liberals and secular humanists right out from under our noses. He deals with the devaluation of human life and traditional values, the family, education, the courts, and the church. You would do well to read this man. 7.50 postpaid.

Our newer subscribers may want to know what we've said in years past, this being our 33rd year of publication, though this includes all our readers. We will send you a random selection of 18 back issues, some as old as the 1960's for only 3.00. But we mail these only once a month, along with our regular mailing.

The Doe of the Dawn, the bound volume of this journal for 1983-84, will be mailed to you sometime this summer, with invoice enclosed, if you have sent us your order. The price will be less than 10.00. Previous bound volumes still available from our office: *Principles of Unity and Fellowship* (1977) and *The Ancient Order* (1978), arc 5.95 each. *Blessed Are the Peacemakers/With All the Mind* (1979-80) and *Jesus Today* (1981-82) are 9.00 each. They are hardbound, matching volumes with dust-jackets and beautifully bound.

Since so many take advantage or the offer, we continue to offer Leroy Garrett's *The Stone-Campbell Movement:/An Anecdotal History of Three Churches* as a bonus when you send us eight subscriptions, new or renewal (24.00 total). Or you may order this much-discussed, much-reviewed, much abused history of our churches for 21.95, postpaid, from us. *Restoration Review,* 1201 Windsor Dr., Denton, Texas 76201

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READERS' EXCHANGE

"Timing is everything." I was made aware of this last week at the Pepperdine Lectures. So many of the ideas expressed were familiar to those of us who have read your articles and Carl Kethcherside's articles for the last 20 years...l just wanted you to know that your ideas are being presented (rearranged and possibly reexamined) but they are a joy to hear being widely accepted. - *Colorado*

I am a descendant of Alexander Campbell. My maternal grandmother was a Campbell. We collect everything we can about our religious heritage. Please send sample copies of your journal which we have heard about. - *Sonny Balchelor, Luray, VA.*

Correction

I was interested to see that you had listed Brookvalley as a church who had dropped "of Christ." We have not separated ourselves from the "churches of Christ" and have not dropped the name from our sign. The other elders and I agreed that I should drop you a note. Jim Bevis was the minister at Brookvalley for a number of years and I was elder most of that time. Jim and I had many conversations about the name. His position was to separate and mine was not to separate. At no time did the elders agree to drop "of Christ." We were surprised at your article but noticed that our stationery reads "Brookvalley Church." Our bulletin also reads this way. The name will be changed when new stationery is ordered. I understand Jim Bevis' position, but the other elders and I disagree with him and still disagree. If you are trying to influence a person (or a congregation) you do not do it by separating yourself from them. I would claim that Brookvalley approaches a traditional church in your book, *The Stone-Campbell Movement.* I do not think it proper to refer to many of the positions of present day churches as traditional. We need roots and a connection to the Church of the Ages and the church of Christ root is a good and valid root. A church without an identity with like churches is like a Christian without a congregation. To try to exist as a congregation without a sense of history is very dangerous, it seems to be. —*Jack Pinkerton, Atlanta, GA.*

(This response from an elder of the Brookvalley Church of Christ in Atlanta clarifies a reference to said church in "When a Church of Christ Changes Its Name" in our January 1985 issue, which told the story of the Quail Valley Church of Christ in Houston changing its name. Jim Bevis was referred to as minister at Quail Valley and former minister at Brookvalley. I am very pleased to make this correction, for I agree with the elders at Brookvalley that they should be the Brookvalley Church of Christ. —*Ed.*)

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